



AATA President Delivers Remarks at Press Conference Unveiling Second Lady Karen Pence's Initiative

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On October 18, 2017, the AATA joined the Second Lady Karen Pence in a press conference to unveil her initiative – Art Therapy: Healing with HeART – hosted by the art therapy program at Florida State University. See [AATA's official press release here](#). The audio of Karen Pence's remarks is [available here](#), and the full footage of the event can be [viewed here](#). **Find below the transcript of the remarks shared by AATA President Donna Betts, PhD, ATR-BC.**

Dr. Donna Betts:

“Thank you, Mrs. Pence. Distinguished guests, I am honored to address you this morning. It's great to be back here at FSU where I completed my doctoral work and taught graduate courses, prior to my current role as Associate Professor of Art Therapy at the George Washington University.

I'm delighted to see so many friends here to mark this important occasion – art therapists, former students, colleagues, and fellow leaders of the six distinct creative arts therapies professions – art, dance, drama, music, poetry, and psychodrama therapies!

The American Art Therapy Association leads the nation in advancing art therapy as a regulated mental health and human services profession. We advocate for expansion of access to art therapists, and we serve as the main source of information about the profession. Our members enter the workforce with a master's degree and gain the supervised clinical experience they need before earning the requisite credentials and licenses as applicable.

But we are so much more than just a professional Association—we are mental health clinicians who care deeply about the communities we assist to enhance their psychological, emotional, and physical well-being. Whether grieving a loss, coping with anxiety or depression, or struggling to live with discrimination – art therapy is for everyone because there are times when we all need support to cope with life's challenges.

Every day, art therapists work with children and families: From those in the adoption and foster care system, to children who are undergoing medical treatments or are struggling with a learning disorder, ADHD, or Autism. Art therapists assist victims of domestic violence, refugees, and other displaced persons, such as survivors of natural disasters like the recent hurricanes and wildfires.

We also work with clients who have suffered trauma like veterans with combat stress, and victims of the Las Vegas tragedy. And we serve older adults who struggle with dementia or Alzheimer’s Disease, and their caregivers.

Here in Florida, our state chapter is responding to the aftermath of Hurricane Irma and, last year, responded to the Pulse nightclub tragedy. Led by our Florida chapter President, Joe Scarce, art therapists helped the Orlando community grieve and heal through art therapy. Thank you, Joe. Our colleagues at the National Endowment for the Arts are funding art therapy at the James A. Haley Veterans Hospital in Tampa. And, a number of years ago here in Tallahassee, I provided art therapy at Canopy Cove eating disorder treatment center. A patient with anorexia, upon her discharge from treatment, said, ‘Art therapy became my strongest emotional outlet and kept me sane most days. Art therapy helped me to see life again, and to reclaim my own.’

While these are just a few examples, the benefits of art therapy are not just anecdotal – outcomes are supported by evidence-based research. Important studies are underway in both the private and government sectors, but more resources are needed to expand the critical priority of research to further advance the profession.

Art therapists work with diverse populations in a variety of settings – from hospitals and wellness centers, to schools, correctional facilities and many more. For those interested in joining our dynamic, growing profession or who know someone who would benefit from art therapy, I invite you to explore the resources available on the American Art Therapy Association’s website.

Art therapists have a shared commitment to a safe, inclusive and just society where all people can flourish, and we are here to help.

I personally want to express my deep gratitude to Mrs. Pence for shining the spotlight on art therapy. Increased public awareness will enable more people to experience the life-changing benefits of art therapy. Thank you, Mrs. Pence.

Now, I would like to invite Dr. Sara Kass, Senior Military and Medical Advisor to Creative Forces, the NEA/Military Healing Arts Network, to offer remarks.”

